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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2017
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [AF](#) [IT](#) [AU](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE TO AUSTRIA: RELEASE OF TALIBAN PRISONERS

REF: STATE 36204

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Scott F. Kilner. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Charge delivered reftel demarche to Peter Launsky, the Austrian MFA's point person in the case of Bert Nussbaumer, the Austrian hostage in Iraq. Charge stressed that we -- and many coalition countries -- were very upset about the resolution of the Italian hostage case. We see the deal which led to the release of Taliban prisoners as setting a very bad precedent.

¶2. (C) Launsky referred immediately to the Nussbaumer case. He expressed great appreciation for the cooperative stance of U.S. and UK authorities. He noted that there was now a secure telephone link between the Austrian team in Kuwait that is handling the Nussbaumer case, and the U.S. hostage unit in Baghdad.

¶3. (S) Launsky said he had discussed with Washington officials the question ("purely hypothetical," he said) of what our attitude would be if a "go-between" approached Austria in an effort to forge a deal for Nussbaumer's release. He said that the answer from one USG agency was that we would have "no problem" with such a situation, as long as the Austrians kept us informed. He continued that he had further asked the specific question of how we would view a situation in which the Austrians received a ransom offer. Launsky said one of his Washington interlocutors told him that they would not pay, "but would support an initiative by third parties, including payment."

¶4. (S) Charge stressed that this does not reflect U.S. policy. Charge read verbatim the text of reftel, para 7 concerning National Security Presidential Directive 12, to the effect that, while we would use all appropriate resources to gain the safe return of hostages, we would not pay ransom, agree to prisoner releases, agree to policy changes, or make any other concessions.

¶5. (S) Launsky said he had heard that relatives of the group of hostages of which Nussbaumer is a part (including American citizens) were planning to go to Iraq in an effort to buy the group's release for 150,000 dollars. Launsky asked that we remain in close contact as this develops.
Kilner